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DE RUEHEG #2079/01 2661520
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P 221520Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0532
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 1212
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0396
RUEH NK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 0039
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1621

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 002079

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, AF/SPG, AF/W, AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SU](#) [SO](#) [MR](#) [IT](#) [QA](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE WORKING WITH AFRICAN UNION TO ADDRESS
KEY AFRICAN CONCERNS

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: According to senior officials at the Arab League and African Union, the two bodies are working closely to address key issues in Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania. AL SYG Amr Moussa and AU SYG Jean Ping head an Arab Ministerial committee on Darfur, and AU Peace and Security Commissioner, Ramatane Lamamra, participated in the recent Arab League ministerial discussions on African issues. The two organizations have similar policies, tactics and strategies on Sudan and Somalia, and are working on efforts to bring Sudanese parties together for talks and provide aid to Somalia. However, there is some variance in tactics on Mauritania, which could lead the Arab League to tacitly accept the recent coup. Arab League efforts to engage with the African Union on important African issues bear watching, but only time will tell if the two organizations can coordinate their efforts enough to affect some positive changes on the African continent. End Summary.

12. (C) Zeid al-Sabban, Arab League (AL) Advisor to the Security General on African Affairs told us on September 16 that discussions during the September 8-9 AL ministerial meetings focused on working multilaterally to resolve issues that affect Arab countries. In Africa, this means working closely with the African Union (AU) to resolve the problems in Sudan, Somalia, and Mauritania. Muftah Zawam, the AU's Head of Delegation in Cairo told us on September 15 that the AU was keen to work with the AL on African affairs, and is cooperating with the League on Sudan, Somalia, and Mauritania. Zawam stated that the role of the AU's office in Cairo was to coordinate with the AL on African issues and opined that the League has a role to play in Africa because "Arabic is the most prevalent language on the African continent, Islam is the largest religion, and 2/3 of all Arabs reside on the African continent."

Ministerial Committee Formed on Sudan

13. (C) Sabban told us that the recent Arab League ministerial meetings led to the establishment of a ministerial committee working group on Darfur. The committee is headed by AL SYG Amr Moussa, AU SYG Jean Ping, and Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad al-Thani. The committee includes the African Arab countries of Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco as well as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Sabban informed us that there were also requests from African capitals, such as

Nairobi and Abuja, to join the committee, but he said it may be "too early in the process to allow them to do so." However, Sabban was excited to tell us that "for the first time we have an Arab League ministerial with an AU commission chair, and together we can be honest brokers." He also said that the committee was in close consultation with UN-AU Chief mediator on Darfur, Djibril Yipene Bassole, and would try to meet with him and possibly UN SYG Ban at UNGA.

14. (C) Sabban told us that the Arab League and African Union are committed to working together, and with the international community, to resolve the Darfur issue. He emphasized that the AL ministerial committee had organized talks on Darfur, which will be held in Doha. Sabban stated that now is the time to fix "the catastrophe in Darfur" and opined that the AL needs to bring all rebel groups, civil society leaders, IDP leaders, and tribal leaders to Doha where they can put all the issues on the table including "blood money." He informed us that Sudanese Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ali Kurti, told the ministerial committee that the Government of Sudan was supportive of AL efforts on Darfur and pledged GOS cooperation. However, Siddique Ander, the president of a Darfuri Arab rebel group, the Democratic Popular Front (DPF)--which is allied with the Justice and Equality Movement and factions of the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement--told us on September 18 that "the Arab League doesn't really care about Darfur," and is too closely aligned with the Government of Sudan (GOS) to be an honest broker. He stated that while there is respect for the Arab League as a whole, and Qatar as a country, he feels that without the participation of a government that can pressure Sudanese

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President Bashir, like the U.S. or France, the Doha talks will not be successful.

15. (C) We mentioned to Sabban that Darfur rebel groups had been quoted in the Arab press as being unwilling to participate in the Doha talks. He told us that he was in indirect communication with some rebel leaders and he said that the rebel leaders had not refused to participate in the talks, but were frustrated because they feel the Arab League let them down by not taking action on Darfur sooner. Sabban dismissed claims that the AL would not be an impartial arbiter by stating that the Arab League, since 2004, has acknowledged "massive violations of human rights in Darfur by both the government and the rebels." Sabban added that the role of the Qataris and Saudis would be critical to the success of the Doha talks because "they understand the tribal mentality" and that will allow them to be more effective in engaging the various Sudanese groups. Zawam told us that the AU was in favor of the Doha talks because the Qataris could bring their financial resources to the table to help get widespread participation. However, he also noted that there was a need to put pressure on leaders like Abdul Wahid al-Nur and Minni Minawi to participate in the talks.

Focusing on Aid to Somalia

16. (C) According to Sabban, the AL's ministerial committee discussed ways to improve the situation in Somalia, and decided to pursue two avenues of aid. The AL is trying to set up a donor's conference for development and reconstruction aid. Sabban told us that the League had two proposals to hold the conference, one from the Saudi Government, and the other from the Government of Italy. He said that the AL thought it may be best for both governments to host conferences, and target the participation of different countries in the two conferences.

17. (C) Sabban said the AL was working to resolve what he called an "unbearable humanitarian situation" and "a reoccurrence of the 1990's" where it was impossible to deliver assistance to those in need due to the hijacking of

aid convoys. He stated that the AL is working with the AU to ascertain how to best deal with this problem. He told us that the AL would work to provide aid supplies, while AU Ugandan troops would provide protection for the aid convoys. Zawam confirmed that the AU was on the same path with AL in Somalia. He said that the AL ministerial committee discussed ways to use the AU military mission in Somalia offer humanitarian support to ward off growing concern of famine in Somalia. Zawam also said there were ministerial discussions on the need to support the Djibouti Agreement between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia.

Varying Tactics on Mauritania

18. (C) Both the AL and the AU stated that one of their most important issues is the governmental crisis in Mauritania. Zawam told us that the AU and AL are involved in "united" discussions on to resolve the situation in Mauritania. Sabban and Zawam both told us that the continued arrests of the president and prime minister are unacceptable and that the democratic process must be restored. However, Zawam indicated that although the "AU and AL share the same goal, they do not have the same tactics."

19. (C) Sabban stated that the presence of the foreign minister of the coup government at the Arab League ministerial was "embarrassing," and was not an endorsement of the coup government. He insisted that the AL did not invite him, but as an institution had no ability to reject his presence. Sabban informed us that the Arab League has a three-step plan to resolve the situation in Mauritania. The plan calls for the release of President Abdallahi, the resignation of President Abdallahi in front of parliament, and the institution of a transitional period, in which the coup leaders must step aside and not interfere in a new

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democratic process. We pointed out that there had already been a democratic process and the current president had been democratically elected. Sabban stated that the AL concluded, after several missions to Mauritania, that the president no longer has the support of the parliament, or society so he should step aside and the parliament can decide on the process for new elections.

110. (C) The African Union views the path forward on Mauritania differently. Zawam stated the AU charter does not recognize unconstitutional changes of government like the coup. Therefore, the AU cut relations with the coup government and will not restore them until the "situation in Mauritania is resolved." Zawam advised us that the AU remained firm that President Abdallahi must be returned to power and democracy must be restored. He told us that the AU plans to discuss how to resolve the situation in Mauritania during the UNGA meetings. Despite the differences between the Arab League and the African Union on Mauritania, Sabban believes that the current Mauritanian Government cannot play the Arab League against the African Union.

111. (C) Comment: The Arab League is putting considerable effort into African issues, by sheer necessity if not out of desire. Sudan was one of the major topics on the agenda for the recent Arab League ministerial, and the Arab League invited AU Peace and Security Commissioner Ramatane Lamamra to participate in ministerial discussions on African issues. The Arab League and the African Union seem to be in agreement on the approach to resolving the crises in Sudan and Somalia. However, very little progress has been made since the end of the Arab League meetings. Despite both AL and AU support, progress organizing the Doha talks on Sudan appears stalled because key Darfur rebel leaders do not view the Arab League and some Arab countries as impartial brokers. Somalia remains a problem due to the lack of a credible domestic

negotiating partner for combined AL/AU efforts, and the limited ability of Ugandan troops to provide security for aid shipments.

¶12. (C) On Mauritania there seems to be considerable daylight between the Arab League solution and the African Union position. Despite Sabban's embarrassment over the participation of Mauritanian coup government's foreign minister in the Arab League ministerial, the Arab League allowed him to fully participate and has taken a position that endorses the consequences of the coup and is out of step with the African Union's condemnation of the coup. Arab League efforts to engage with the African Union on important African issues bear watching, but only time will tell if the two organizations can coordinate their efforts enough to affect some positive changes on African continent.

SCOBAY